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Administrative Careers With America

Background Information and Sample Questions for the Examination for

Careers in Personnel, Administration, and Computer Occupations

Office of Personnel Research and Development

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U.S. Office of Personnel Management

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE EXAMINATION FOR CAREERS IN PERSONNEL, ADMINISTRATION, AND COMPUTER OCCUPATIONS

One process for filling entry-level jobs in the Personnel, Administration, and Computer occupations requires competitive selections from a pool of applicants according to merit system principles. The examination for these occupations is composed of a written test of job-relevant abilities and a questionnaire dealing with biographical information called the *Individual Achievement Record (IAR)*. By combining these measures, the examination provides a comprehensive index of your probable job success.

This booklet describes the written test and the *IAR*. The written test and the *IAR*, together, will take approximately three and one-half hours to complete.

THE WRITTEN TEST

Purpose of the Test. The written test is designed to measure: 1) the ability to understand language; and 2) the ability to use reasoning in the context of language, as well as to solve quantitative problems and problems presented in tabular form.

Preparing for the Test. The written test is divided into two parts. Part A is composed of a Vocabulary section and a Reading section. Part B is composed of a Tabular Completion section and an Arithmetic Reasoning section. It is very important that you study the four types of sample questions included in this booklet before the examination. It is advisable to do this repeatedly over a period of time to become familiar with the item types.

Time Limits. In each part of the test, a reasonable amount of time is included for the careful reading of the instructions. Be sure to use this time well. Each part of the test has a definite time limit. There is enough time for most people to answer every question. Nonetheless, some questions may be more difficult than others. Do not spend an excessive amount of time on one question to the detriment of your total test performance. You can always go back to a skipped question if you finish a part of the test before the time limit for that part is over. To ensure that you have time to answer every question, you should keep track of the time by periodically checking your watch or the room clock. Also, the examiner will tell you when you have ten minutes left before the end of each part. If you find that the time is almost up and you have left one or more questions unanswered, make an intelligent guess on the answers and mark them in the answer booklet. Your score will not be lowered for wrong answers in this test; rather, your score will be based on the total number of items that you answer correctly.

Answering the Questions. First, read each question very carefully. Then, read the alternative responses given and, if you know the correct answer, darken the corresponding space in the answer booklet. If a question appears especially difficult, you may choose to leave it and return to it later before time is called. If you do skip a question, be sure to skip the corresponding number in the answer booklet. (A

copy of the first page of the answer booklet appears at the end of this publication as a reference for you.) If, after the test, you think you did not answer all the questions correctly, do not be discouraged. No applicant is expected to answer every question correctly.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

The questions selected as sample questions for the written test are similar to the questions you will find in the actual test in terms of difficulty and form. In general, the test questions deal with topics related to Government business which you would be likely to encounter in the performance of jobs in the Personnel, Administration, and Computer occupations. Remember, however, that *knowledge of any job-specific subject matter is NOT required to answer the questions correctly.*

PART A: VOCABULARY AND READING

The total time allotted for Part A is 50 minutes. Part A will consist of fifteen vocabulary questions and twenty reading questions. It should take you about 5 minutes to answer the vocabulary questions, which would leave you 45 minutes for the reading questions. Do not spend much more than five minutes on the vocabulary questions, since this would cut into the time you have for answering the reading questions. However, if you finish Part A before the allotted time is over, you should review your answers in both the Vocabulary and the Reading sections, especially any answers about which you were uncertain.

VOCABULARY QUESTIONS

Federal jobs in the Personnel, Administration, and Computer occupations require you to communicate well both in written and spoken language. Consequently, a good vocabulary is important for successful job performance. The following questions present a key word and five suggested answers. Your task is to find the suggested answer that is closest in meaning to the key word. Wrong answers may have some connection with the word, but their meanings will be essentially different from that of the key word. Sample questions 1 and 2 are examples of the vocabulary questions in the test.

1. To *collaborate* means most nearly to work

   A) rapidly
   B) together
   C) independently
   D) overtime
   E) carefully

The word *collaborate* means to work with another, especially on a project of mutual interest. Therefore, response B, *together*, is the best answer. Responses A, D, and E are clearly unrelated to the meaning of *collaborate*, and response C, *independently*, is opposite in meaning.

2. *Altruistic* means most nearly

A) unselfish
B) extended
C) unimaginative
D) organized
E) appealing

To be *altruistic* means to be concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others. Therefore, response A, *unselfish*, is an excellent synonym. Response B could be viewed as slightly related, since *altruistic* people often extend themselves to help others. However, the basic meaning of *extended*--stretched out--is completely different from the meaning of *altruistic*. Responses C and D are clearly unrelated to the meaning of *altruistic*. A vague connection exists between *altruistic* and response E, *appealing*. *Altruistic* people often make appeals on behalf of those less fortunate than themselves. Simultaneously, the generosity of *altruistic* people often makes them very *appealing* to other people. Although this vague connection exists between *altruistic* and *appealing*, they do not share a similar meaning.

READING QUESTIONS

In each of these questions you will be given a paragraph which contains all the information necessary to infer the correct answer. Use **only** the information provided in the paragraph. Do not speculate or make assumptions that go beyond this information. Also, assume that all information given in the paragraph is true, even if it conflicts with some fact known to you. Only one correct answer can be validly inferred from the information contained in the paragraph.

Pay special attention to negated verbs (for example, "are <u>not</u>") and negative prefixes (for example, "<u>in</u>complete" or "<u>dis</u>organized"). Also pay special attention to quantifiers, such as "all," "none," and "some." For example, from a paragraph in which it is stated that "it is not true that all contracts are legal" one can validly infer that "some contracts are not legal," or that "some contracts are illegal," or that "some illegal things are contracts," but one **cannot** validly infer that "no contracts are legal," or that "some contracts are legal." Similarly, from a paragraph that states "all contracts are legal" and "all contracts are two-sided agreements," one can infer that "some two-sided agreements are legal," but one **cannot** validly infer that "all two-sided agreements are legal."

Bear in mind that in some tests, universal quantifiers such as "all" and "none" often give away incorrect response choices. That is **not** the case in this test. Some correct answers will refer to "all" or "none" of the members of a group.

Be sure to distinguish between essential information and unessential, peripheral information. That is to say, in a real test question, the example above ("all contracts are legal" and "all contracts are two-sided agreements") would appear in a longer, full-fledged paragraph. It would be up to you to separate the essential information from its context, and then to realize that a response choice that states "some two-sided agreements are legal" represents a valid inference and hence the correct answer.

Sample questions 3 and 4 are examples of the reading questions in the test.

3. Personnel administration begins with the process of defining the quantities of people needed to do the job. Thereafter, people must be recruited, selected, trained, directed, rewarded, transferred, promoted, and perhaps released or retired. However, it is not true that all organizations are structured so that workers can be dealt with as individuals. In some organizations, employees are represented by unions, and managers bargain directly only with these associations.

The paragraph best supports the statement that

A) no organizations are structured so that workers cannot be dealt with as individuals
B) some working environments other than organizations are structured so that workers can be dealt with as individuals
C) all organizations are structured so that employees are represented by unions
D) no organizations are structured so that managers bargain with unions
E) some organizations are not structured so that workers can be dealt with as individuals

- The correct answer is response E. This conclusion can be derived from information contained in the third sentence of the paragraph, which states that *it is not true that all organizations are structured so that workers can be dealt with as individuals*. From this statement, it can be inferred that *some organizations are not structured so that workers can be dealt with as individuals*.

- Response A is incorrect because it contradicts the information in the third and fourth sentences of the paragraph. With its double negation, response A is in effect saying that all organizations are structured so that workers can be dealt with as individuals. This flatly contradicts the third sentence and also contradicts the fourth sentence, which says that *in some organizations, employees are represented by unions, and managers bargain with these associations*.

- Response B is not supported by the paragraph because the paragraph gives no information about working environments other than organizations.

- Response C is not supported by the paragraph because the paragraph says only that employees are represented by unions in *some* organizations. One cannot generalize from this to say that employees are represented by unions in *all* organizations.

- Response D is incorrect because it contradicts the fourth sentence, which says that managers bargain with unions in some organizations.

Note that in this question, the correct answer follows basically from one sentence in the paragraph--the third sentence. The rest of the paragraph presents additional information about personnel administration which is relevant to the discussion, but not necessary to make the inference. Part of your task in the Reading section is to *understand* what you read, and then to *discern* what conclusions follow logically from statements in the paragraph. Consequently, in this test, you will find some questions in which it is necessary to use all or most of the statements presented in the paragraph, while in others, such as this one, only one statement is needed to infer the correct answer.

4. Many kinds of computer programming languages have been developed over the years. Initially, programmers had to write instructions in machine language. If a computer programming language

is a machine language, then it is a code which can be read directly by a computer. Most high-level computer programming languages, such as Fortran and Cobol, use strings of common English phrases which communicate with the computer only after being converted or translated into a machine code.

The paragraph best supports the statement that

A) all high-level computer programming languages use strings of common English phrases which are converted to a machine code
B) if a computer programming language is a machine language, then it is not a code which can be read directly by a computer
C) if a computer programming language is a code which can be read directly by a computer, then it is not a machine language
D) if a computer programming language is not a code which can be read directly by a computer, then it is not a machine language
E) if a computer programming language is not a machine language, then it is a code which can be read directly by a computer

- The correct answer is response D. The answer can be derived from the information presented in the third sentence. That sentence states that *if a computer programming language is a machine language, then it is a code which can be read directly by a computer.* From this statement it can be seen that all machine languages are codes which can be read directly by a computer, and that if a computer programming language is not such a code, then it is not a machine language.

- Response A goes beyond the information presented in the paragraph, which states only that *most* high level computer programming languages use strings of common English phrases.

- Response B represents a complete contradiction of the third sentence of the paragraph.

- Response C contradicts the paragraph. We know from the paragraph that at least some coded languages which can be read directly by a computer are machine languages.

- Response E is incorrect because the paragraph does not say whether or not computer languages that are *not* machine languages are codes which can be read directly by a computer.

PART B: TABULAR COMPLETION AND ARITHMETIC REASONING

The total time allotted to Part B is 50 minutes. Part B will consist of ten tabular completion questions and fifteen arithmetic reasoning questions. It should take you no more than 15 minutes to answer the tabular completion questions, which would leave you 35 minutes for the arithmetic reasoning questions. Some problems in Part B may be solved by more than one method. When this is the case, use whatever method is fastest and easiest for you. Keep in mind, however, that each question has only one correct answer. If you finish Part B before the allotted time is over, you should review your answers in both the Tabular Completion and Arithmetic Reasoning sections, especially any answers about which you were uncertain. *The use of calculators will NOT be permitted during the actual test; therefore, they should not*

be used to solve these sample questions.

TABULAR COMPLETION QUESTIONS

These questions are based on information presented in tables. Only *two* sample questions of this type appear below, although, in the actual test, you will have to find *five* unknown values in each table. You must calculate these unknown values by using the known values given in the table. In some questions, the exact answer will not be given as one of the response choices. In such cases, you should select response E, "none of these." Sample questions 5 and 6, which are based on the accompanying table, are examples of the tabular completion questions in this test.

FEDERAL BUDGET RECEIPTS, OUTLAYS, AND DEBT
FISCAL YEARS 1981-1985
(In millions of dollars)

ITEM	FISCAL YEAR				
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Total Receipts	(I)	298,060	355,559	399,561	463,302
Federal funds	187,505	201,099	241,312	270,490	316,366
Trust funds	116,683	131,750	150,560	165,569	186,988
Interfund transaction	−25,098	−34,789	−36,313	−36,498	−40,052
Total Outlays	324,244	364,473	400,507	448,368	490,997
Federal funds	240,080	269,921	295,757	331,991	362,396
Trust funds	109,262	(II)	141,063	152,875	168,653
Interfund transactions	−25,098	−34,789	−36,313	−36,498	−40,052
Total Surplus or Deficit (−)	−45,154	−66,413	−44,948	−48,807	(V)
Federal funds	−52,576	−68,822	−54,444	−61,501	−40,030
Trust funds	7,422	2,409	9,496	12,694	12,336
Gross Federal Debt	544,131	631,866	(III)	780,425	833,751
Held by Government agencies	147,225	151,566	157,295	169,477	189,162
Held by the public	396,906	480,300	551,843	610,948	644,589
Federal Reserve System	84,993	94,714	105,004	(IV)	115,594
Other	311,913	385,586	446,839	495,468	528,995

Hypothetical data.

5. What is the value of I in millions of dollars?

A) 91,585
B) 162,407
C) 279,090
D) 304,188
E) none of these

The correct answer is C. It can be calculated by adding the Receipt values for *Federal funds, Trust funds,* and *Interfund transactions*. Numerically, 187,505 + 116,683 + (-25,098) = 279,090.

6. What is the value of II in millions of dollars?

A) 329,684
B) 129,341
C) 94,552
D) -101,202
E) none of these

The correct answer is B. It can be calculated by subtracting the Outlay values for *Federal funds* and *Interfund transactions* from the value for *Total Outlays*. Numerically, 364,473 - (269,921) - (-34,789) = 129,341.

ARITHMETIC REASONING QUESTIONS

In this part of the test you will have to solve problems formulated in both verbal and numeric form. You will have to analyze a paragraph in order to set up the problem, and then solve it. If the exact answer is not given as one of the response choices, you should select response E, "none of these." Sample questions 7 and 8 are examples of the arithmetic reasoning questions in this test.

7. An interagency task force has representatives from three different agencies. Half of the task force members represent Agency A, one-third represent Agency B, and three represent Agency C. How many people are on the task force?

A) 12
B) 15
C) 18
D) 24
E) none of these

The correct answer is response C. It can be obtained by computing the following:

$$1/2X + 1/3X + 3 = X$$

X is equal to the total number of task force members; 1/2X represents the number from Agency A; 1/3X represents the number from Agency B; and 3 is the number from Agency C. The first two terms on the left side of the equation can be combined by computing their lowest common denominator, which is 6. Therefore:

$$1/2\ X = 3/6X \quad \text{and} \quad 1/3\ X = 2/6X$$

The sum of 3/6X and 2/6X is 5/6X, which, when subtracted from X (or 6/6X), yields the results:

$$1/6X = 3 \text{ and } X = 18$$

Responses A, B, and D are the result of erroneous computations.

8. It has been established in recent productivity studies that, on the average, it takes a filing clerk 2 hours and 12 minutes to fill four drawers of a filing cabinet. At this rate, how long would it take two clerks to fill 16 drawers?

A) 4 hrs.
B) 4 hrs., 20 min.
C) 8 hrs.
D) 8 hrs., 40 min.
E) none of these

The answer is E. The correct answer is not given as one of the response choices. The answer can be obtained by first converting 12 minutes to .2 hour, and then setting up a simple proportion:

$$2.2/4 = x/16$$

Solving this proportion, we obtain $4X = 35.2$; $X = 8.8$. This, however, is the number of hours that it would take one filing clerk to do the job. If two clerks are filling the 16 drawers, the job would be completed in half that time or in 4.4 hours, which is 4 hours, 24 minutes.

Responses A, B, C, and D are the result of erroneous computations.

THE INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT RECORD (IAR)

The *Individual Achievement Record* is a multiple-choice questionnaire about your experience, skills and achievements in school, employment, and other activities. This questionnaire is based on research on the actual characteristics of successful people in professional and administrative occupations. It is designed to supplement the written test by giving a broader perspective on your qualifications for a wide range of jobs. For each question, you will be asked to select the most accurate description of yourself from among the choices given.

The *IAR* does not penalize you if you have not gone to college or have no previous work experience, but rather, credits you with how well you have made use of your opportunities.

The *IAR* is completed in the examination room. You should answer the questions to the best of your recollection. Since the questions deal with your experience and skills, special preparation is not needed. However, you should think about and be familiar with your high school and college grades, other academic achievements and activities, and your work experience and work achievements.

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
ANSWER BOOKLET

SIGNATURE: _____
(Please Sign)

EXAMINATION TITLE: _____

PLACE OF EXAMINATION: _____
City State

TODAY'S DATE: _____

DIRECTIONS FOR MARKING ANSWER BOOKLET SAMPLE A B C D E

Use only a **No. 2 (or softer) lead pencil.** Darken completely the oval corresponding to your answer. You **must** keep your mark within the oval. Stray marks may be counted as errors. Erase **completely** all marks except your answer.

Make no marks or entries in the columns to the right until you receive instructions from the administrator.

TEST NUMBER | TEST SERIES | PART

SECTION 1

1. In the boxes below, **PRINT** your name. Print only as many letters as will fit within the areas for the last name, first initial (F.I.), and middle initial (M.I.). Below each box, darken the oval containing the same letter. SEE SAMPLE NAME GRID

LAST NAME | F.I. | M.I.

SAMPLE NAME GRID

LAST NAME: M C C A B E | F.I.: C | M.I.: A

2. In the boxes below, enter your 9-digit Social Security Number. Below each box, darken the oval in each column corresponding to the number you have entered.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

3. OCCUPATIONAL GROUP NUMBER

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